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ABSTRACT

This study examined ways in which contact with family members, in particular the teenage mother's own mother and partner, would be related to developmental outcomes in middle childhood in both black and white families. Also investigated were factors (mother's income, age, level of education, and home environment) that could affect these relationships. Data were obtained from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and included a subset of female youth (N=338) who had been teenage mothers and on their children. Adolescent mothers were interviewed in 1979 and then yearly until 1986; all mothers had a child who was either 6 or 7 years old in 1986 when the children were assessed with a developmental battery. The results indicated that black teenage mothers lived longer with their parents while white adolescent mothers married earlier. Mother's age was related to the availability of support persons; younger mothers remained at home with their mothers and/or remained single while older mothers were more likely to live with a partner. There were several differences between black and white families in the role of the grandmother and partner in the child's development. The findings indicated that contact with family members may have both positive and negative relationships with the home environment and child outcomes. (NB)

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Families of adolescent parents: Predictors of developmental outcomes

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The purpose of our study was to examine the ways in which contact with different family members, in particular the teen's mother and partner, would be related to developmental outcomes in middle childhood in both black and white families. We also investigated several factors including the mother's income, age, level of education, and home environment which could mediate the nature of these relationships.

Subjects were 338 teen mothers and their children. The mean age of mothers was 17.6 years, ranging from 14 to 19 years old. The children's age ranged from 6.0-7.9 years old, averaging 6.96 years. Data are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The NLSY is a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of both male and female youth, including an overrepresentation of blacks and economically disadvantaged youth. Our research is based on a subset of female youth who had been teen parents and on children born to these teens. Adolescent females in this subset had been interviewed in 1979 and then yearly until 1986; all mothers had a child who was either 6 or 7 years old in 1986. In 1986 (and only this year), their children had been assessed with a developmental battery.

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The highlights of this present research are the longitudinal approach, the focus on family issues, and the study of elementary age children born to teen parents, a population which has received very little attention to date. Most research concerning developmental outcomes of children born to teen parents has focused on the period of infancy.

**Paper presented at the Society for Research on Adolescence, Atlanta, 1990.

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Introduction

Approximately 500,000 children are born to teen parents each year (Hayes, 1987). The problems associated with these teen pregnancies are numerous. Adolescent mothers have lower levels of educational achievement, occupational status and income, and higher probabilities of marital instability compared to women who become mothers at a later age (Teti, Lamb & Elster, 1987). Teen mothers often have unrealistic expectations concerning their infants' development, are more punitive in their child-rearing attitudes, and tend to be less verbal when interacting with their infants (McAnarney, Lawrence, Ricciuti, Polley, Szilagyi, 1986; Whitman, Borkowski, Schellenback, & Nath, 1987). Children of teen mothers receive inadequate prenatal care, have higher rates of infant mortality, morbidity, and incidence of illness, and are lower in birth weight than children born to older mothers (Broman, 1981; Roosa, Fitzgerald, & Carlson, 1982b). The negative consequences of teen pregnancy for children continue into the later years. Intellectual differences become evident in preschool years and are more pronounced in the elementary school years as compared to children of older mothers (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg, 1986). Most research to date, however, has focused on adolescent parent-infant interactions, leaving many questions to be answered concerning older children of teen parents.

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which contact with different family members, in particular the teen's mother and partner, would be related to developmental outcomes in middle childhood in both black and white families. We also investigated several factors including the mother's income, age, level of education, and home environment which could mediate the nature of these relationships.

Method

Subjects were 338 teen mothers and their children. The mean age of mothers was 17.6 years, ranging from 14 to 19 years old. The children's age ranged from 6.0- 7.9 years old, averaging 6.96 years. Data are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The NLSY is a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of both male and female youth, including an overrepresentation of blacks and economically disadvantaged youth. Our research is based on a subset of female youth who had been teen parents and on children born to these teens. Adolescent females in this subset had been interviewed in 1979 and then yearly until 1986; all mothers had a child who was either 6 or 7 years old in 1986. In 1986 (and only this year), their children had been assessed with a developmental battery.

Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment-Short Form. A brief version of the HOME, developed by Bradley (co-author of original HOME) and NLSY staff, was used. The HOME provides a measure of the quality of stimulation and support in the home for the child. It has two overall subscales: cognitive stimulation and maternal responsiveness.

Behavior Problems Index. The scale, consisting of 28 items, deals with specific problem behaviors that a child may or may not have exhibited in the previous three months. It includes items derived from other child behavior scales (Achenback & Edelbrock, 1981; Peterson & Zill, 1986).

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R). The PPVT-R (form L) is widely used overall measure of verbal ability and scholastic aptitide which has demonstrated reliability and validity. It is a good predictor of early and middle school outcomes (Dunn & Dunn, 1981).

Family factors. Family variables concerning grandmother and partner presence in the household, child care, and contact with the father outside of the home were created from survey data collected over time.

Results and Discussion

As expected, the mother's age was related to the availability of support persons; younger mothers remained at home with their mothers and/or remained single while older mothers were more likely to live with a partner. There were also differences in the availability of support persons for black and white parents. Black teens more often lived with their parents, maintained a single parenting status or got married later than white teens.

For all families, teens whose grandmothers provided regular child care during their child's first two years were able to complete more years of schooling. Children who engaged in activities in 1986 with their fathers or mother's partners had greater opportunities for stimulation in the home. There were several differences between black and white families in the role of the grandmother and partner in the child's development as shown in Table 1.

The results indicate that contact with family members may have both positive and negative relationships with the home environment and child outcomes. Teen parenthood often results in mothers raising their children in single parent households which poses significant challenges for establishing and maintaining networks of support (Kellam et al, 1982; Pressor, 1989). Future research is needed which studies a broad range of sources of support including the mother's siblings, parents, and partner, as well as nonfamily ties. Ties to professionals and formal support systems could be particulary useful for those teens with strained family relations. The benefits, limits, and changes in support over time and the process by which support influences developmental outcomes needs further investigation.

The strengths of this present research are the longitudinal approach, the focus on family issues, and the study of elementary age children born to teen parents, a population which has received very little attention to date.

Most research has focused on the period of infancy. This study, however, is limited due to secondary analyses of household data which was not originally collected for the purposes of this study. Household presence of family members does not indicate the quality of the relationship nor the types of family interaction. Qualitative indices of social support may result in different findings. Further study is needed of the ways in which family's respond to adolescent pregnancies. Closer attention to racial differences in understanding adolescent parenting is strongly suggested by this study and previous research (Moore, Simms & Betsey, 1986; Stevens, 1988). Understanding the different responses of families to teen pregnancy and the consequences of the different patterns of support has significant implications for those working with teen parents.

TABLE 1
Relationships between Family Factors, Mother's Age, Intermediate Maternal Outcomes and Child Outcomes*

	WHITE						BLACK					
		Maternal Outcomes			Child Outcomes		Maternal Outcomes			Child Outcomes		
	Age	ED.	COG. STIM.	RESP.	PPVT	BPI	ED.	COG. STIM.	RESP.	PPVT	BPI
Family Support												
Grandmother												
Present at birth	-.30***	.01	-.10	-.03	-.07	.15*	.21***	.08	-.10	.08	-.04
Presence over time	.35***	-.01	-.21**	-.08	-.15*	.13	.09	.04	-.18**	-.01	.03
Child care	-.01	.19*	.15*	-.10	.05	.16*	.16**	.12	-.02	.17*	.00
Partner												
Presence over time	.23***	-.06	.03	-.10	.16*	.04	-.10	.01	-.01	-.03	.03
Father contact	.12*	.06	.07	.05	.19*	-.15*	.01	.08	-.08	.01	.07
Partner involvement	.11	.02	.19*	.13	.15*	-.17*	.14	.28***	.02	.06	.04
Maternal Intermediate Outcomes												
Highest grade completed	.26***				.23**	.01				.27**	-.05
Cognitive stimulation	.13*				.26**	-.09				.12	-.09
Responsiveness	.09				.17*	-.08				.14*	-.06

* p <.05
** p <.01
*** p <.001

* Note: age is controlled for by income; all other correlations controlled for by age and income.

TABLE 2
Racial Context of Teen Parenthood

	Black	White	df	X^2
Teen lived with mother[a]	79%	49%	1	31.3***
Regular childcare by grandmother[b]	20%	15%	1	1.2
Stable single parenthood	49%	12%	1	54.8***
Teen lived with partner[a]	57%	85%	1	46.5***
Partner present at birth[b]	13%	50%	1	54 0***
Partner disruption (≥1 change)	24%	38%	1	7.4**
Child contact with partner (yes/no)	75%	91%	1	15.5***
Frequent child contact with baby's father ('86)	42%	69%	1	22.7***
Frequent child contact with mother's partner	50.2%	67.8%	1	18.9**
Mother employed outside of home ('86)	42%	56%	1	6.5*
Poverty status	65%	32%	1	33.7***

	Black	White	df	t
Age of mother at child's birth	17.5	17.7	336	1.5
Age of spouse of mother ('86)	28.4	28.1	155	.50
Age at first marriage	19.48	17.54	227	6.19***
Highest grade completed (by '86)	11.26	10.54	334	3.9***
Net family income	13,099	18,655	293	3.19**

	Black	White	df	F
PPVT[a]	79.83	96.72	(1,259)	66.68***
BPI[a]	10.68	10.45	(1,280)	.98
Cognitive Stimulation[a]	79.86	92.24	(1,247)	10.51**
Responsiveness[a]	59.62	67.09	(1,271)	6.33*

Note: [a] at some point after child's birth
[b] year of and year following birth
[c] family income is controlled for in F test

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

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